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ABSTRACT

Although attractive people are often assumed to have many socially desirable characteristics, observers also attribute certain negative traits to them (i.e., more snobbish, more materialistic, more likely to be unfaithful). To examine whether unattractive people would be seen as more machiavellian (having more negative traits) and whether observers with low machiavellian scores (low machs) would rate attractive and unattractive photographs differently than high machs in terms of machiavellianism, psychology students (N=101) rated photographs of women aged 18-25 as well as a brief "biography" of the photo subject using two machiavellian scales. Analyses of results showed that unattractive people were not viewed as more machiavellian. However, high machs gave similar mach scores to the attractive and the unattractive photos, while the low machs discriminated more. Data indicated that negative stereotypes of attractive people are moderated by dispositional factors in the observers, i.e., sex, authoritarianism and machiavellianism. (WAS)

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Review and Extension of the What-is-Beautiful-is-Good Hypothesis: Inclusion of Machiavellianism

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Running head: Mach and Beauty

Abstract

A review of the What-is-Beautiful-is-Good hypothesis showed that attractive people are not seen as having only socially desirable characteristics. To further expand the scope of this apparent stereotype, high- and low-scorers on the Christie scale of machiavellianism were shown photos of attractive and unattractive women, and asked to fill out the machiavellianism scale as the target women would. Results showed that low-machs (low-scorers) did attribute different scores to attractive and unattractive women, while high-machs (high-scorers) did not. In addition, men and high-machs, as compared to women and low-machs, independently attributed higher machiavellianism scores to the target photographs. However, an expected main effect for photo attractiveness did not reach significance. The original hypothesis was then revised and presented in expanded form.

Review and Extension of the What-is-Beautiful-is-Good Hypothesis: Inclusion of Machiavellianism

Research in the area of physical attractiveness and social perception has generally shown that attractive people are assumed to have more than their share of socially desirable characteristics. Miller (1970), for example, asked observers to state their impressions of attractive and unattractive photographs on the Adjective Preference Scale, and found that on 15 of the 17 dimensions used, the attractive photograph was rated significantly higher on the socially desirable end of the dimension. This same type of result was obtained in a more robust fashion by Dion, Berscheid, and Walster (1972), and was therein called "What is Beautiful is Good."

Subsequent studies (Gillen, 1975; Dermer & Thiel, 1975; Dushenko, Perry, Schillings & Smolarski, 1978; Solomom & Schopier, 1978), in part, supported the "What is Beautiful is Good" hypothesis, and concluded that observers rated attractive photographs as more kind, more intelligent, more sincere, more altruistic, more exciting, more outgoing, less conventional, and less boring than their unattractive counterparts. However, it was not long before qualifications to the Dion et al. (1972) hypothesis were put forth.

Arguing that the "What is Beautiful is Good" hypothesis may not hold beyond certain dimensions, Dermer and Thiel (1975) expanded the areas on which attractive and unattractive persons were rated. They replicated the Dion et al. (1972) results within the areas previously used (e.g., kind, interesting, outgoing, etc.), but also found that the attractive targets were seen as more likely to be unfaithful in marriage, more likely to get divorced, more vain, more egotistical, unsympathetic to oppressed peoples, more materialistic, and more snobbish, among other things. Clearly, then, observers did not perceive attractive persons as having only socially desirable characteristics, and it is with this expansion of rating areas that this study concerns itself.

Specifically, how is physical attractiveness related to target machiavellianism (Christie & Geis, 1970) in the eyes of disinterested observers? Given the mixed results of the Dion et al. (1972) and Dermer and Thiel (1975), we can see that observers do not assume across-the-board goodness in attractive people. It appears instead that observers may have a stereotyped image of what attractive and unattractive people are like, and that this image contains positive and negative traits. Thus, the position of machiavellianism within this stereotyped image would depend, in part, on those environmental and situational histories that gave rise to the stereotype in the first place.

The fact that machiavellianism, because of its unsavory notions of interpersonal manipulation and deceit, is generally regarded as socially undesirable (Christie & Geis, 1970) may have nothing to do directly with the stereotype. However, if observers feel that attractive people have advantages in society, and that unattractive people must use other means (e.g., intelligence or deceit) to accomplish their goals, then unattractive people may be supposed to indeed be more machiavellian (hypothesis one).

Another point of interest is the effect of observers' characteristics on the attributions made by these observers concerning target persons. More specifically, the constructs of authoritarianism, dogmatism and need for affiliation have been found to affect individual responses to strangers (Jones, 1954; Rokeach, 1960; Byrne, 1962). In terms of machiavellianism, Geis and Levy (1970) had low-, middle-, and high-machs play a legislature game that essentially involved discussions. Afterwards the subjects were asked to pick a person within their group and to try to answer the machiavellianism scale the way the target person would. Results showed that low-machs were more sensitive overall to the real differences between target people, and that high-machs were not. Since this is the study that bears most directly on the present design, it was hypothesized that low-mach observers would rate attractive and unattractive photographs differently in terms of machiavellianism, and that high-machs would not (hypothesis two).

Method

Subjects

One hundred and one undergraduate psychology students signed up for a study on "impressions" and received credit for their participation.

Instruments

Glossy, black and white photographs of women aged 18-25 were used in the study. For rating instruments the subjects filled out shortened versions (means corrected to compensate) of the Mach IV and Mach V machiavellianism scales (Christie & Geis, 1970). High scorers (high-machs) on this scale generally are cynical and endorse a philosophy of guile, deception, and interpersonal manipulation; low scorers (low-machs) are more moralistic, idealistic, and tend to lose out to high-machs in laboratory games where bargaining, bluffing, and conniving are allowed.

Procedure

Black-and-white photographs of 12 college women were taken; the women were chosen so as to represent a wide range of facial physical attractiveness. These 12 photographs were then presented to 10 judges who were asked to rate them on a scale from -10 (extremely unattractive), through zero (neutral), to +10 (extremely attractive). The mean rating for each photo was then computed; the most attractive (M = 7.30, SD = 1.42, N = 10) and the most

unattractive (M = -7.30, SD = 3.23, N = 10) were then retained for this study. Since ratings on physical and facial beauty seem to be very reliable and robust (Berscheid & Walster, 1974; Berscheid, Dion, Walster & Walster, 1971; Kerr & Kurtz 1978; Newman, 1980) it was deemed suitable to employ only 10 judges in this initial phase of the study. A correlated t-test between the means of the two chosen photographs (attractive and unattractive) produced t (9) = 3.99, $p < .01$, thus substantiating the contention that these two were very distinct on an attractiveness dimension.

To avoid the possibility of subjects recognizing the women in the photographs, the next phase of the study was conducted at a different college in the same city. Psychology undergraduates signed up for the study and arrived at prescheduled sessions which had already been predetermined to have either the attractive or the unattractive photograph. In all other respects these two conditions were identical.

Subjects were then told that the study involved the impressions that one gets while looking at photographs of people. At this point a 5x7 black-and-white glossy photograph of "Kay Porter" was presented, taped to a moveable blackboard which was positioned in front of all Ss in each session. Ss were then given a short biography on Kay Porter and asked to fill out an opinion scale (the Mach IV scale) the way Kay Porter would. After finishing with the Mach IV scale they were instructed to state their

own opinions on an additional opinion scale (Mach V). The rationale for using a different version of the machiavellianism scale for the subjects' own responses was to minimize spurious covariation due to response set or the tendency to attribute one's opinions to someone else. Mach IV uses a Likert 7-point format, while Mach V employs a forced choice design. In this respect it is assumed that the subjects'recall of specific scores that they gave the photos would not be directly translatable into specific scores that they would mark on the subsequent Mach V scale. Empirically, though, the two versions of the scale show correlations of .70 and above, and both have been validated in laboratory studies (see Christie & Geis, 1970, p. 106).

After the Ss filled out the Mach V the study was terminated and all were debriefed. Thus, the study involved two levels of attractiveness of the photograph, the machiavellianism level attributed to the photograph, and the machiavellianism level of the observers.

Results

To facilitate an analysis of variance, the total score on the Mach V scale for the Ss was computed and the distribution dichotomized. Ss scoring above 86 were labelled high-machs, while those scoring below 83 were labelled low-machs. Altogether

the subjects' mean score on the Mach V was M = 85.4 (SD = 14.6, N = 101). The mean Mach IV score attributed to the photographs, combined across both conditions, was M = 81.8 (SD = 16.3, N = 101).

An analysis of variance using the attributed Mach IV score as the dependent variable, and attractiveness of photograph, Mach level of observer, and sex of observer as the independent variables was then performed. Contrary to expectations, hypothesis one was not supported (F (1, 92) = 1.28, n.s., see Figure 1).

Insert Figure 1 about here

Overall the attractive photo was attributed a total Mach IV score of M = 83.3 (SD = 14.4, N = 55) while the unattractive photograph was given one of M = 80.0 (SD = 18.4, N = 46). However, looking at the second independent variable we do see a main effect. High-machs attributed a total Mach IV score of M = 87.0 (SD = 16.1, N = 47) in both photograph conditions combined, while low-machs attributed one of M = 77.4 (SD = 15.4, N = 53). The difference was reliable (F (1, 92) = 10.47, p = .002). And in terms of the sex of the observer we also see a main effect (F (1, 92) = 4.70, p = .033). Males attributed a score of M = 86.5 (SD = 12.9, N = 28) to the photos, while females attributed one of M = 80.1 (SD = 17.2, N = 73).

In regards to hypothesis two the interaction of observer mach level (high or low) and attractiveness of each photograph turned out to be significant (F (1, 92) = 3.97, $p < .05$). High-machs gave very similar mach scores to the attractive and unattractive photos (85.9 and 88.5, respectively), while low-machs discriminated more (80.9 and 73.4, respectively). Neither of the other two interaction terms reached significance.

Discussion

The fact that hypothesis one was not supported necessitates some elaboration. Given the previous results of Dion et al. (1972) and Dermer and Thiel (1975) we can conclude that observers do seem to have some stereotypic notions about the characteristics that attractive and unattractive people possess. The problem lies in that only through actual data collection can we ascertain what the stereotype looks like. Observers seem to feel that attractive people are kinder, more sociable, more intelligent, etc. than their less attractive counterparts. Indeed they also feel that attractive people may possess such socially undesirable qualities as snobbishness, vanity, and unfaithfulness. That the present results showed no main effect for attributed machiavellianism across the two levels of attractiveness of photos may be interpreted in two general fashions. First, it could be argued that the real nature of the scale was not salient enough for the observers to make judgements about how the target person would answer

such a scale. Possibly so, but some of the items used deal explicitly with interpersonal deception and manipulation (e.g., "It is wise to flatter important people" and "Never tell the real reason you did something unless it is useful to do so"). If observers in general had a stereotypic belief about the deceitfulness of attractive and unattractive people, then it would have been generally easy for observers to note this predilection on the 7-point Likerts of the Mach IV scale.

Secondly, it may just be the case that machiavellianism as a target characteristic has nothing to do with attractiveness levels in the eyes of disinterested observers in general. It is, in fact, surprising, since Miller (1970) reports that unattractive targets were seen as being externally-oriented on Rotter's (1966) locus of control scale. It appears that observers may have opinions about the sense of control that attractive and unattractive targets have, and that these observers, as a whole, do not see a difference in the manipulative levels of these two types of targets.

The problem, however, is somewhat resolved by the significant interaction of observers' mach level and the attractiveness of the photograph. From Figure 1 we can see that the low-machs attributed different mach scores to the two types of photographs, and that the high-machs saw these two targets as very similar on this dimension. This configuration of results reflects to

some extent the results of Geis and Levy (1970), who maintain that low-machs are more sensitive to differences across target persons. In this case, however, sensitivity cannot be assessed, but we may conclude that part of the interpersonal sensitivity of low-machs may be due to a fortuitously correct bias in assuming that people different on one dimension are consistently and necessarily different on another.

In terms of the "What is Beautiful is Good" hypothesis, the present results extend the attributional areas that are related to the attractiveness of target photographs. That high-machs and men, independently, gave significantly higher machiavellianism scores to the photos further delineates some complexities in our interpretation of the concomitants of beauty. Studies such as Byrne, London, and Reeves (1968), Dermer and Thiel (1975), Rai and Srivastava (1977), Novgorodoff (1977), Mashman (1978), Dushenko, Perry, Schilling, and Smolarski (1978), and Hirschberg and Jennings (1980) have already presented evidence of how certain situational or dispositional factors within the observers can affect judgements of target persons. In light of all this evidence it would appear prudent to restate the "What is Beautiful is Good" hypothesis in this fashion:

A. Observers in general possess a stereotyped image of physically attractive and unattractive target persons.

   1. This stereotype assumes that attractive persons possess a variety of socially desirable characteristics, some of which are kindness, poise, intelligence, wit, assertiveness, cleanliness, warmth, strength, and sophistication.

   2. Concurrently, the stereotype assumes that attractive persons have undesirable characteristics centered around a general theme of snobbishness and selfishness. They are seen as being materialistic, snobbish, more likely to have an affair after marriage, more likely to divorce, and as being unsympathetic to oppressed peoples.

B. The above stereotype is moderated by a variety of dispositional factors within the observers. Observers' sex, authoritarianism, physical attractiveness, similarity to target on opinion items, and machiavellianism will moderate the strength or direction of the stereotype.

Clearly, specificity can be given undue weight at the expense of simplicity and parsimony. The perceptual biases of high- and low-machs could even be broken down by the factorial nature of the machiavellianism scales (Martinez, 1980, 1981). However, the hypothesis as investigated by Miller (1970) and stated by Dion et al. (1972) retains the general flavor of the above expanded version. Perhaps it should state: "What is Beautiful is Good. Sometimes."

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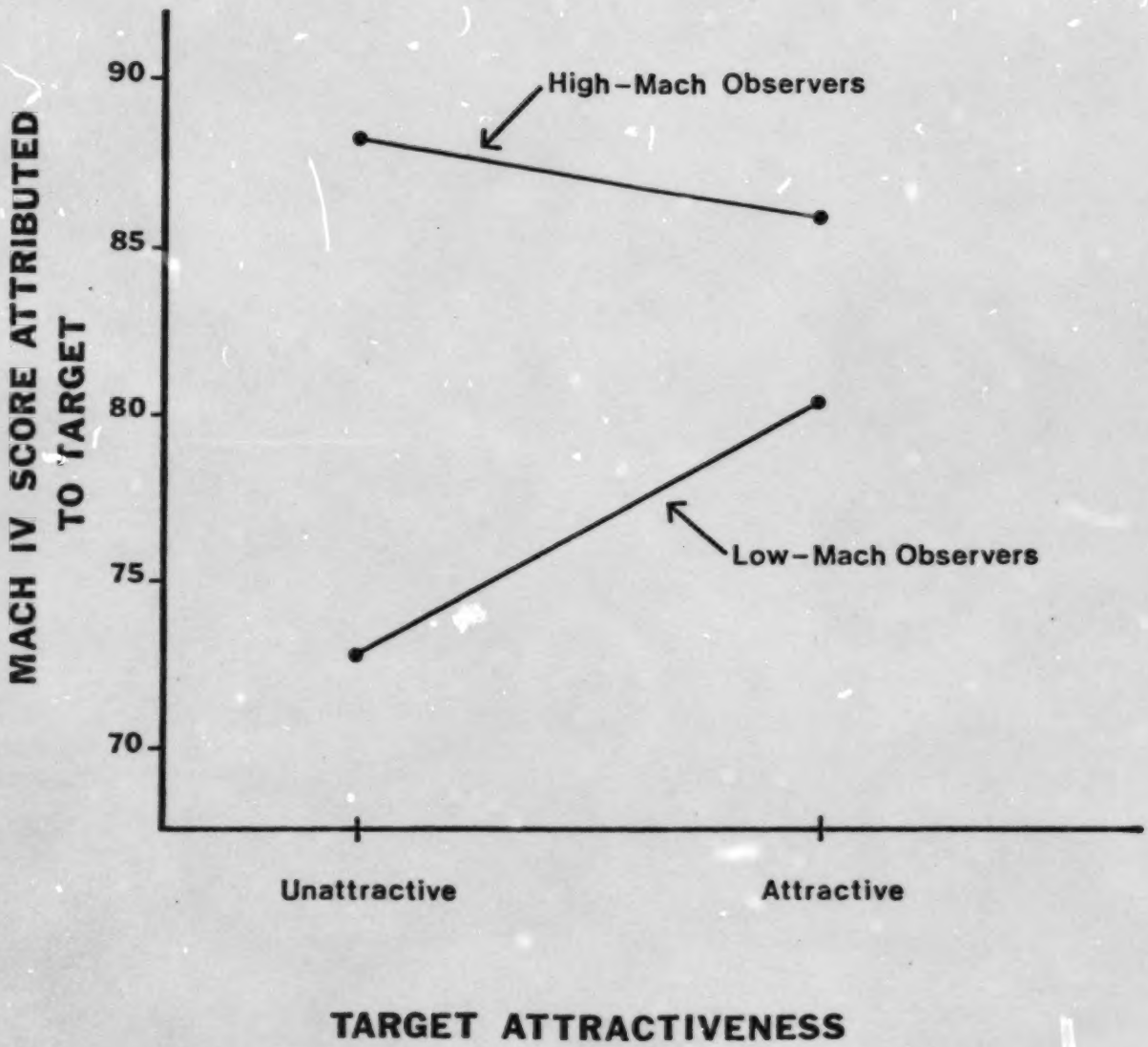
Footnote

The senior author is a member of both The Psychology Department and The Goodrich Scholarship Program at UNO. Special thanks are due to Dean John Kerrigan and Assistant Dean David Hinton for making computer funds available for this study. All correspondence should be directed to Daniel C. Martinez, The University of Nebraska, Annex 20, Omaha, NE 68182.

Figure Caption

Figure 1. Mean machiavellianism scores attributed by observers to attractive and unattractive women.


MACH IV SCORE ATTRIBUTED TO TARGET
90
85
80
75
70
High-Mach Observers
Low-Mach Observers
Unattractive
Attractive
TARGET ATTRACTIVENESS